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THE PLAN OF OLD LOS ANGELES

AND THE STORY OF ITS HIGHWAYS AND BYWAYS.

BY J. M. GUINN.

[Read December 2, 1895.]

The history of the founding of our American cities shows that the location of a city, as well as its plan, is as often the result of accident as of design. Neither chance nor accident entered into the selection of the site, the plan, or the name of Los Angeles. All these had been determined upon years before a colonist had been enlisted to make the settlement. The Spanish colonist, unlike the American backwoodsman, was not free to locate on the public domain wherever his caprice or his convenience dictated.

The Spanish poblador (founder or colonist) went where he was sent. He built his pueblo after a plan designated by royal reglamento and decreed by the laws of the Indies. His planting and his sowing, the size of his fields and the shape of his house lot, were fixed by royal decree. He was a fief, a dependent of the crown. The land he lived on was not his own, except to use. If he failed to cultivate it, it was taken from him and he was deported from the colony.

The pueblo plan of colonization did not originate with the Spanish-American colonists. It was older even than Spain herself. In early European colonization, the pueblo plan—the common square in the center of the town, the house lots grouped around it, the arable fields and the common pasture lands beyond, appears in the Aryan village, in the ancient German mark, and in the old Roman praesidium. The Puritans adopted this form in their first settlements in New England. Around the public square or common, where stood the meeting house and the town house, they laid off their home lots, and beyond these were their cultivated fields and their common This form of colonization was a combination of communal pasture lands. interests and individual ownership. Primarily, no doubt, it was adopted for protection against the hostile natives, and secondly, for social advantage. It reversed the order of our own western colonization. The town came first, it was the initial point from which the settlement radiated; while with our own western pioneers the town was an afterthought—a center point for the convenience of trade.

The plaza is a an essential feature in the plan of all Spanish-American towns. It is usually the geographical center of the pueblo lands. plaza of El Pueblo de Nuestra Sonora, La Reina de Los Angeles (the town of our Lady, the Queen of the Angels) as decreed by Gov. Felipe de Neve in his "Instruccion para La Fundaccion de Los Angeles," was a parallelogram one hundred varas in length by seventy-five in breadth. It was laid out with its corners facing the four winds or cardinal points of the compass, and with its streets running at right angles to each of its four sides, so that no street would be swept by the wind. Two streets, each ten varas wide, opened out on the longer sides, and three on each of the shorter sides. Upon three sides of the plaza were the house lots 20x40 varas each, fronting on the square. One half of the remaining side was reserved for public buildings—a guard house, a town house, and a public granary; the other half was an open space. Around three sides of the old plaza clustered the mud-daubed huts of the pioneers of Los Angeles, and around the embryo town, a few years later, was built an adobe wall—not so much perhaps for protection from foreign invasion as from domestic intrusion. It was easier to wall in the town than to fence in the cattle and the goats that pastured on the ejidos or commons, outside the walls.

The area of a pueblo, under Spanish rule, was four square leagues of land, or about 17,770 acres, (a Spanish league contains 4444 acres.) The pueblo lands were divided into solares or house lots, suertes or planting fields, dehesas or outside pasture lands, ejidos or commons—lands nearest the town where the mustangs were tethered and the goats roamed at their pleasure; propios—lands rented or leased from which a revenue was raised to pay municipal expenses; realengas—royal lands, also used for raising revenue for the town government.

In 1786, five years after the founding of the Pueblo of our Lady of the Angels, Alferez Josê Arguello, aided by corporal Vicente and private Roque, put the nine settlers who had been faithful to their trust, in possession of their house lots and planting fields. Three of the pobladores originally recruited to found the pueblo had been deported for general worthlessness.

Lieut. Arguello spent but little time over surveys and probably set up no land-marks to define boundaries. The proprios were said to extend southerly 2,200 varas from the dam (which was located near the point where the Buena Vista street bridge now crosses the river) to the limit of the distributed lands. The realengas were located on the eastern side of the river.

The boundaries of the Plaza viejo or old plaza, as nearly as it is possible to locate them now, are as follows: The southeast corner of the plaza would coincide with what is now the northeast corner of Marchessault and Upper Main streets. From the said northeast corner of these streets draw a line

northwest one hundred varas (278 feet)—this line would constitute the east erly line of the old plaza. On this line construct a parallelogram with its opposite or westerly side one hundred varas in length, and its northerly and southerly sides seventy-five varas each. These boundaries will locate, approximately, as near as it is possible now to locate the plaza real or royal square of the old Pueblo of our Lady of the Angels.

At the founding of the pueblo, September 4, 1781, the plaza was dedicated with solemn ceremonies. A mass was said by a priest from the Mission San Gabriel aided by the choristers and musicians of that mission. were salvos of musketry, a procession with a cross, candlesticks, etc. standard of Spain, with the image of our Lady the Queen of the Angels, (the latter carried by the women) was borne at the head of the procession. procession made a circuit of the plaza, the priest blessing the plaza and the building lots, and it is said that Governor Neve made a speech, the first ever made within the limits of Los Angeles. I have been unable to find any satisfactory reason assigned for the abandonment of the old plaza. The probable cause of the change was the location of the Church of our Lady of the Angels on its present site. The first church or chapel was a small building, 25x30 feet, begun in 1784, and completed in 1789. It fronted on the plaza. The new church was begun in 1814. By order of Governor Sola, in 1818, the site was changed to higher ground—its present location. The building was completed in 1822—forty-one years after the founding of the Pueblo. The open space in front of the church was part of the ejidos or commons, and was used for a place to picket mustangs while the owners were attending church. In course of time it became recognized as the plaza or public square.

Neve's streets that were to be free from the sweep of the winds, have disappeared. There are no land marks to show the location of the twelve house lots that clustered around the old plaza. Nor can we locate the boundaries of any one of the twenty-seven suertes or sowing fields that were laid off on the alluvial lands below the plaza. Time, flood, and the hated gringos have long since obliterated all ancient landmarks and boundary lines of the old Pueblo as effectually as did Neve's pobladores all traces of the Indian town, Yangna, that once stood on the site chosen for the Pueblo of our lady of the Angels.

As the town grew, it straggled off from its nucleus—the old plaza in an irregular sort of a way—without definite plot or plan. When a house was to be built the builder selected a site most convenient to his material—adobe. If his house did not conform to the lines of the street, the street must adjust itself to the house. Fifty years after the founding of the Pueblo there was not a regular laid off street within its limits. Indeed there was but little necessity for streets. There were no wheeled vehicles, save a few old screaking

carretas, used for hauling brea or asphaltum—the roofing material of the adobe houses. The caballero on his wiry and sure footed mustang, threaded his way among the scattered and irregularly built houses, and it mattered little to him whether the path zigzagged or ran in straight lines. Walking was a lost art to the native Californian. He was a centaur—half horse and half man—and only half a man, without his horse. As he never walked when he could ride, sidewalks he did not need.

With the growth of the town southward, the business center drifted from its first locality on Upper Main street, and for a time became fixed at the head of Los Angeles street where that street intersected with Aliso, Arcadia, Sanchez and Negro alley. At that point Los Angeles was then a very broad street probably two hundred feet wide; it narrowed as it ran southward and widened again at its intersection with First street. In the early part of the century it was known as Zanjo, (ditch) street. In the early thirties it had been dignified into the Calle Principal or Main street and with its continuation the Calle de Los Huertos—the street of orchards—(now San Pedro) formed the principal highway running southward from the center of the Pueblo; later on it was known as Vineyard street.* First street at its intersection with Los Angeles and San Pedro was known as Broad street or Broadway—A misnomer now but appropriate enough in the days of cheap lands.

Under Spanish rule the absolute title of all the lands in California was vested in the King. The individual occupant held only a usufructuary title. It was his to use so long as he used it for the purpose for which it was given him. Possession then was ten parts of the law. The occupant could hold on but he could not let go of it. To cease to use his land was to lose it. He could not sell it, he could not even indulge in that privilege so dear to the American land owner, he could not mortgage it. The land passed from father to son by the law of primogeniture.

When California became a part of the Mexican Republic the title to pueblo lands became vested in the ayuntamiento or town council. When the Pueblo of Los Angeles became a city in 1835, there was not a land owner in it who had a written title to his lands. Under Spanish rule the military commissionados, and under Mexican, the ayuntamiento made verbal grants. In 1836 owners was ordered to apply for written titles but little heed was given to the Order. Efforts were made from time to time to induce the occupants of town lots to perfect their titles. But the easy going methods of the pobladores had been transmitted to their descendants. Land was cheap and plentiful. There was no inducement to land grabbing, consequently disputes over titles and

Note.—For information in regard to the old names of streets I am indebted to C. C. Grove of the West Coast Abstract company, Los Angeles.

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land boundaries were of rare occurrence and title deeds when given were loosely drawn. The more or less in a conveyance never worried the party of the second part. In the minutes of the ayuntamiento may be found the grant of a certain piece of land now known as the Requena tract which is described and deeded as that lot or tract on which the "Cows ate the apples."

On the 23rd of May 1835, Los Angeles ceased to be a Pueblo. The following is a translation of the copy of the decree erecting it into a city:

His excellency, the president ad interim of the United States of Mexico Miguel Barragan. The president ad interim of the United States of Mexico to the inhabitants of the Republic let it be known: That the general congress has decreed the following: That the town of Los Angeles, Upper California, is erected to a city, and shall be for the future the capital of that territory.

Basilo Arrillaga, Antonio Pacheco Leal,

President House of Deputies. President of the Senate.

DEMETRIO DEL CASTILLO, MANUEL MIRANDA,

Secretary House of Deputies. Secretary of the Senate.

I, therefore, order it to be printed and circulated and duly complied, with. Palace of the Federal Government in Mexico, May 23, 1835.

MIGUEL BARRAGAN.

Although the Mexican Congress by decree had erected Los Angeles to a city yet to the Californians it was still the Pueblo. Even now after sixty years of city life, to the old time native Californian it is still the "Pueblo." The decree made it a city but it was ten years after, before it became the capital. The citizens failed to provide suitable buildings and the denizens of Monterey clung to the archives. The "Ciudad de Los Angeles" was a city of magnificent distances when it first took on metropolitan airs. The Departmental Assembly of 1834 designated the boundaries of the Pueblo of Los Angeles to be "two leagues to each wind from the center of the Plaza." This gave the Pueblo, when it was "erected into a city," an area of sixteen square leagues or over one hundred square miles. There was no survey of boundary lines, and the city fathers worried along ten years without knowing exactly where the city ended and the country began. In 1846, an attempt was made to fix the boundaries but all that was done was to measure two leagues "in the direction of the four winds from the Plaza church" and set stakes as boundary Then came the American invaders.

At the time of the American occupation (1846), the city had skirted along the foothills as far down as First (or Primero) street with possibly a few scattering houses below that point.

The discovery of gold and the rush of immigration to the mines aroused the sleepy old "ciudad" of Los Angeles from its bucolic dreams. A stream of immigration, by the southern route, poured through its streets and gold flowed into its coffers from the sale of the cattle that covered the plains beyond. With increasing prosperity the city became ambitious to make a better appearance. The ayuntamiento decided to have a portion of the mesa lying to the south of Calle Primero and west of Calle Principal surveyed and subdivided into city lots and sold to procure a fund to make some needed improvements.

In the city clerk's office is a copy of a map of the first subdivision of Los Angeles city lands made after the American occupation. It is entitled, "Plan de la Ciudad de Los Angeles, by E. O. C. Ord, Lt. U. S. A., Wm. R. Hutton, Asst., August 29, 1849." Ord's survey embraces all that portion of the city bounded north by First street and the base of the first line of hills, east by Main street, south by Twelfth street and west by Pearl street. Also that portion of the city north of Short street and west of Upper Main to the base of the hills. On the "plan" the lands between Main street and the river are designated as "plough grounds, gardens, corn and vine lands." The streets in the older portion of the city are marked but not named. The blocks, except the first tier, are 600 feet in length, and are divided into ten lots each 120 feet front by 165 feet in depth.

Ord took his compass course for the line of Main street S. 24 ° 45 · W. from the corner opposite Josê Antonio Carrillo's house which stood where the Pico House now stands. This lot was granted Carrillo by the Comissionado in 1821 and is one of the earliest transfers of which there is any record On Ord's map, Main, Spring and Fort (Broadway) streets ran in parallel straight lines to Twelfth street. How Main street came to zigzag below Sixth street, Spring to disappear at Ninth street, and Fort to ignominiously end in Governor Downey's orange orchard, (subdivided in 1884), are things that as Lord Dundreary says, "No fellow can find out." Ord probably made an accurate survey but many of the blocks now are irregular, some contain an excess and others are short and some of the streets have drifted away from their original locations. This, in part, is due to the easy going methods of those early days. The ayuntamiento was to have placed permanent monuments to mark the corners of blocks, but neglected to do so. corner stakes were convenient for picketing mustangs and were rapidly disappearing. The Council, a year or so after the survey was made, gave Juan Temple a contract to place stone monuments to mark the corners. He hired a gang of Mexicans to do the work. If they found a corner stake they placed a monument; if not, some one of the gang paced off the length of the block and set the corner stone. The excess in some blocks and the shortage in others might be accounted for if we could find out whether it was a long-legged or a short-legged paisano that did the stepping. The price of Ord

survey lots on Spring street in the fall of '49 and spring of '50 ranged from \$25 to \$50 each.

The names of the streets on Ord's plan are given in both Spanish and English; beginning with Main they are as follows: Calle Principal—Main street; Calle Primavera-Spring street, named for the season spring Calle Fortin-Fort street; Calle Loma-Hill street; Calle Accytuna-Olive street; Calle de Las Caridad—The Street of Charity (now Grand avenue); Calle de Las Esperanzas—The Street of Hopes; Calle de Los Flores—The Street of Flowers; Calle de Los Chapules-The Street of Grasshoppers (now Pearl street). North of the plaza church the north and south streets were the Calle de Eternidad-Eternity street, so named because it had neither beginning nor end, or, rather, each end terminated in the hills. Calle Cel Toro -Bull street, significant of the national pastime of Spain and Mexicothe bull fight. Calle de Las Arispas—Hornet street; an exceedingly lively street at times when the hornets had business engagements with the paisanos. Calle de Las Adobes-Adobe street, well named. The east streets were Calle Corta—Short street; Calle Alta— High street; Calle de Las Virgines-Street of Virgins; Calle del Colegio -College street, the only street that retains its primitive name.

The Calle de Las Chapule; was for many years the extreme western street of the city. The name originated thus: On certain years, mostly during the dry or drouth years, myriads of grasshoppers hatched on the low grassy plains of the Ballona and Cienegas. When they had devoured all vegetation where they originated, they took flight, and, flying with the wind, moved in great clouds towards the east—like the locusts of Egypt, devouring everything in their course. When the destroying hosts reached the Calle de Las Chapules, the vinatero knew his grape crop for that season was doomed. The voracious hopper would not leave a green leaf on his vines, and the vineyardist considered himself fortunate if the destroying host did not devour the bark as well as the leaves.

Calle Primavera—Spring street, sixty or seventy years ago was known as the Calle de Las Caridad—the Street of Charity. The aristocratic part of the city in those days was in the neighborhood of the plaza, and on Upper Main street. Spring street being well out in the suburbs, its inhabitants were mostly peons and Mexicans of the poorer class, who were dependent largely upon the charity of their wealthier neighbors. There is a tradition, which I have not been able to verify by written record, that back about the beginning of the century, Spring street was known as Calle Cuidado—Lookout or Beware street, so-called because of the numerous washes and gulches cutting across it from the low foothills. The name would be

appropriate now, but it would be for other reasons.

Main street below the junction, about that time was known as Calle de Las Allegria—Junction street. The question is often asked why was Spring swung off on a diagonal to form a junction with Main? The historical facts of the case are that Main street forms a junction with Spring. portion of Spring street between the junction and first, is the older street by many years. It is part of an old road made more than a century ago. It began at the old plaza and followed the present line of Main street to the junction. In Ord's "plan," this old road is traced from the junction north-westward. It follows the present line of Spring street First street, then crosses blocks 2 and 4, diagonally, to the corner of Third and Broadway. It intersects Hill at Fourth street and Olive at Fifth street, skirting the hills it passes out of the city near Ninth street to the brea springs from which the colonists obtained the roofing material for their adobe houses. This road or street was used for many years after the American occupation and was recognized as a street in conveyances. Within the past three years the city council gave a quit-claim deed to a portion of this street to a lot owner in Block 111/2 O. S. It has been, by some poetical historiographers, claimed that this road was part of the Camino del Rey, (the King's highway) of the olden times. "The King's horses and the King's men" may have galloped over it bearing royal mandates from pueblo to presidio, but creaking carretas, loaded with brea, were more common than the King's caballeros on this "royal road." On a map of the pueblo of Los Angeles, made in 1786, when Arguello surveyed the lands of the founders, there is a road marked as beginning at the southeast corner of the old plaza, from thence running southeasterly until it intersects what is now Aliso street; thence following the present line of that street it crosses the river and passes out of the pueblo to the southeast. There are traces of this road in the old records. It leads southeastward through the Paso de Bartolo, thence to San Juan Capistrano and San Luis Rev, to San Diego; then down the coast of Lower California to Loreto, near Cape San Lucas. This, in the days of "the road from Winchester town, a good broad highway leading down," but rather a camino de herradura—a bridle path. Wheeled vehicles seldom Although but the semblance of a road, yet time and again has this old highway echoed the tread of marching armies. In the troublous times of 1831-3, when Echeandia of the south and Zamarano of the north waged a bloodless warfare against each other and fired off sesquipedalian pro nunciamientos as ferocious in the rhetoric as they were harmless in effect, down this old camino from Paso de Bartolo rode Echeandia's faithful adherent, Captain Barroso, at the head of a thousand mounted Indians intent

on the capture of the recalcitrant Pueblo of Angeles, but at the intercession of the beleaguered inhabitants, this modern Corilanus turned aside to regale his neophyte retainers on the fat bullocks of the San Gabriel Mission. And via the Camino real from Los Nietos rode Juan Gallardo, the cobbler, in command of his fifty Sonoran patriots, when, in imitation of the hidalgos of his native land, he essayed to play at the national game of Mexico—revolution. And by the same highway, he entered the pueblo in the small hours of the morning, and awoke its conscript fathers from their dreams of peace by the drum beat of war. And along the same Camino real, from Paso de Bartolo, marched the saxon conqueror, Stockton, with his invading army. On this roadway was fought the last battles of the conquest, when the boom of Stockton's cannon sounded the death knell of Mexican domination in California.

Going northward the Camino real, or main highway, crossed the river near the base of the hills and followed up its valley to the Mission San Fernando; from there westerly to San Bunenaventura, then on to Santa Barbara and the missions beyond, to Monterey. In the waning years of the last century out from the capital, Monterey, on the first day of each month, rode a courier southward, gathering from each mission, pueblo and presidio its little budget of mail as he made his monthly trip to Loreto on the Gulf—a perilous ride of a thousand miles over the old Camino del Rey.

There was one street in the older portion of Los Angeles that is not named in Ord's plan, but which, in the flush days of gold mining from 1850 to '55, had a more wide-spread notoriety than any other street in the city. It was the Calle de Los Negros in Spanish, but Americanized into Nigger It was a short and narrow street extending from the then termination of Los Angeles street to the plaza. In length it did not exceed 500 feet. Yet within its limited extent it enclosed more wickedness and crime than any similar area on the face of the earth. Gambling dens, saloons, dance houses, and disreputable dives lined either side. From morning to night, and from night to morning, a motley throng of Americans, Mexicans, Indians and foreigners of nearly every nation and tongue crowded and jostled one another in its dens and dives. They gambled, they drank, they quarreled, they fought, and some of them died—not for their country—although the country was benefitted by their death. In the early '50s there were more desperadoes, outlaws and cut-throats in Los Angeles than in any other city on the coast. In the year 1853 the violent deaths from fights and assassinations averaged over one a day. The Calle de Los Negros was the central point towards which the lawlessness of the city converged. It was, in its prime, the wickedest street on earth. With the decadence of gold mining the character of the street changed, but its morals were not improved by the change. It ceased to be the rendezvous of the gambler and the desperado and became the center of the Chinese quarter of the city. Even in its decadence its murderous

character clung to it. On this street in 1871 took place that terrible tragedy known as the Chinese Massacre, when eighteen Chinamen and one white man were murdered. The extension of Los Angeles street obliterated it from the plan of the city.

When the United States Land Commission, in 1851, began its herculean task of adjudicating the Mexican land grants in California, the city of Los Angeles laid claim to sixteen square leagues of land. The Hancock survey of 1853, had divided the city lands south of Pico street, to the Ranchos Los Cuervos (Crow Rancho) and the Paso de La Tijera, and on the west to the La Cienega, into 35 acre tracts known as city donation lots. The city limits on the south, (west of the river) extended nearly three miles below the present boundary line of the city, and on the west nearly two miles, to the Cienega. All the territory sought to be annexed to the city at the recent election was once within the city limits. The streets, south of Pico, were named after the presidents. Beginning with Washington, in regular succession followed, Adams, Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, John Quincy Adams and Jackson streets. All these streets, except parts of the first three, have long since disappeared in the orange groves of Vernon and the market gardens of University and Rose-The Mexican governors, after whom the north and south streets were named, have been more fortunate than the presidents. We still have Echeandia, Figueroa, Alvarado and Micheltoreno streets, although considerably curtailed as to length South of Boyle Heights and east of the river, the Ro. San Antonio curbed the city's ambition to expand in that direction. On the north and north-west the Ro. Los Feliz and the Verdugos encroached on the city's area and the hostile owners refused to be surveyed into the city. On the east, from the center of the plaza it was two leagues to the city line. The area of the city according to the Hancock (or Hansen) survey of 1855, was a fraction less than 50 square miles—a magnificent city on The land commission in 1856, confirmed to the city a grant of four square leagues (about 28 square miles) and rejected its claim to all outside of that. After many delays, in 1875, nearly twenty years later, a United States patent was issued to the mayor and council—and then the greater Los Angeles of the early 50's, shrank to the proportions of Felipe de Neve's Pueblo of 1781, -"one league to each wind measured from the center of the plaza."

It was not to be expected that Neve's ease loving pobladores would long preserve in its entirety the musical but long drawn out name of the new born town by the Rio Porciuncula, El Pueblo de Nuestra Sonora, la Reina de Los Angeles, was inconveniently syllabic for every day use; in 1787 it had been abbreviated and changed to Santa Maria de Los Angeles, later on to Santa Maria. It was at one time proposed to change the name to Villa Victoria la Reina de Los Angeles so that it might not be confounded with Puebla in

old Mexico. In the tumultuous days of '39 when the seditious and turbulent angelenos vexed the righteous soul of good old prefect, Cosme Peña, he was wont to speak of it as the Pueblo de Los Diablos—the town of the devils. In official documents, under Mexican rule, it was simply Angeles. It is to be regretted that the Americans after the conquest did not continue the custom and thus save posterity the necessity of speaking and writing the prefix 'Los."

In almost every "write up" of the early history of Los Angeles appears this venerable fiction "The founders of the town numbered twelve adult males, all heads of families." "There were forty-six persons in all." "The men were discharged soldiers from the Mission San Gabriel." This fiction has not that merit of the old time novels, "founded on facts." It is all fiction. There were not twelve founders—Rivera enlisted fourteen pobladores in Sonora and Sinaloa, two deserted, one was left behind at Loreto * in Lower California and then there were only eleven. There was not forty-six persons in all—only forty-four. Not a man of the eleven was a discharged soldier from San Gabriel. None of them had ever been at San Gabriel until they arrived with Zuñiga's expedition on the 18th of August preceding the founding. Of the twenty-two adults, two were Spaniards, nine were Indians and one mestizo (one was classed as a coyote-wild indian) and ten were negroes and mulattoes. Early in 1782, three of the founders, one of the Spaniards and two of the negroes were deported from the colony for general worthlessness and their property taken from them, and then there were but eight founders. In 1785, Sinova who had been a laborer in California for several years, joined the colony making nine heads of families, the number to whom Arguello distributed the house lots and the sowing fields in 1786. The founders left no lasting impress on the town. Not a street in the city bears the name of any one of them. Five of the Mexican governors have had streets named after them, but not one of the Spanish governors of California has been so honored. No street or landmark bears the name of good old Felipe de Neve, the real founder of Los Angeles. Nor have Portola, Fages, or Borica, men of honor and high standing been remembered in the nomenclature of its highways. Of the old Pueblo de Nuestra Sonora, La Reyna de Los Angeles, so carefully planned and so reverently named by Governor Felipe de Neve only an abbreviation ‡ of the name remains, and even the signification that that conveyed to the good old governor has been changed by the modern dwellers in the new city of The Angels.

^{*} There is no evidence that he ever joined the colonists at Los Angeles.

[†] Los Angeles.